

Lebanese Lullaby [Textual Transcription]

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A LEBANESE LULLABY

The lullaby in the Arabic language is based on a fourteenth century historical incident, which took place in Lebanon.

In the words of the singer, Nicholas Debs, a Syrian-American grocer of Jacksonville, Florida: "I will tell you the best I can the translation of the song into English. You cannot expect to get a beautiful thing like that into a translation and still keep its beauty. I can only give you its meaning.

"A little Syrian girl was sent to a spring for water. She was told to be watchful and return home by a secret path. She tarried too long at the spring, enjoying the shade and listening to the songbirds in the trees. She lost her fear of any danger and enjoyed herself. After a while a Turk came to her and told her not to be afraid, but to come with him and he would give her something very pretty. She then remembered her parents' advice, and became very frightened. She cried out, but the Turk took her by force to his own home to serve in it as a slave. Later, in the hope of receiving praise from his superior officer, he gave her to him to serve as a nurse for the officer's children.

"The little girl was very smart. She did her work well and kept her face sweet and happy. Although she was very sad, she would not let anyone know it. She knew in her heart that her parents would seek her. She did not know how they would find her, but she felt sure that she would be freed from her slavery to the Turks.

"One day as she rocked the little baby to sleep and sang as usual 2 she saw a man that walked like someone she knew. This man was disguised in Turkish clothing and carried a big basket of fruit. She had not noticed a fruitman before in the village, so she began to

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sing about the day that she went to the spring to get the water and was stolen away. She sang louder and louder as the peddler came near to the window where she sat. Suddenly, she recognized her father. His beard was dyed and his clothes were not a Christian's garb. She She sang, 'I am well and I have enough to eat and I do not want for anything, but I do want my own mama and papa. I work as a slave for an officer of the Turkish army, and I take care of his little babies.'

"She continued on with the song, telling about disobeying her mother's instructions, and that if she were only free she would be a good little girl for the rest of her life. But, she sang, the water was cool and the sun was hot, and she didn't mean to forget the instructions of her parents.

"The father was happy, but he could not say a word to let her know that he recognized her. So she sang so loud that the baby cried and its mother came to see what had happened. The father went on with his basket, pretending to sell fruit. He wanted to figure some way to free her, and that had to be done carefully; the Turks would kill the girl if they thought she was about to get away. He hurried along his way, trying to avoid detection by the Turks. He reached home and called a meeting of his friends, to plan how they could steal quietly to the Turk's home in the night and take her away.

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This little story is told in song, and is meant to express the love of a father and mother for their children, as well as the danger they will risk in order to get a child out of trouble.

"The little girl was smart, she kept quiet and sweet. That kept the Turkish family from being fearful that she might try to get away from them. She even pretended that she was happy and sang as she worked. She sang so much that they had not noticed the words that she sang. That night her father and his friends carried her away without any difficulty."

The spring mentioned in the song was excavated more than 20 years ago by Mr. Debs. The tree we hear about in the song is an almond tree (the Majiliak), which has been given

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the name of a woman who spent her life in serving the orphans and widows of Christian soldiers killed in war with the Turks. The tree and spring were near a well-travelled highway, and offered shade and rest to travelers. Her memory has been retained in the hearts of those that traveled that journey.

The tree is centuries old, and its fruit is said to be unequaled throughout all Lebanon. The taproot grows close to a wall surrounding the spring, which acts as a support for the tree. At the time of excavation, however, the tree was found to be mostly new life that had sprung from time to time from the roots; the original trunk had long since decayed. The roots are as huge and gnarled as the limbs of an old water oak.

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The spring and tree were located in an old, rundown homestead, and the owner was unaware that the point of historical interest existed on his property. It is situated in the city of Ghazier, the State of Kisrawan, Lebanon.

Mr. Debs states that a famous tree of Biblical history, the Cedar of Lebanon, is also located near this property. He explains his reason for making the excavation of the spring as follows:

“In my childhood a friend of my father's took a great deal of interest in me. This man was a Burhman (burgomaster?) and a student of history. On his death-bed he requested that I be given his manuscripts and maps, for which I was most grateful. Although I had a nice library and a good collection of maps, I did not have the maps that would point me to the spring and the tree I had heard my mother sing to me about as a little boy. I had hoped to find the spring someday, but thought that it might turn out to be a vain hope, as I could not seem to find any information that would lead me to the exact spot.

“When time and my responsibilities would permit me to do so, I started out on my destination, keeping it a secret. I found the old farm, and the owner thought that I was crazy to talk to him about the little lullaby that he too had heard all his life. He had no

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idea that the spring was on his own property. I persuaded him to allow me to excavate; of course, taking care not to injure the root of the old almond tree. After some days digging and observing carefully 5 all the signs of the soil and its dampness, I was convinced that I had found the spring where the little girl came for the water.”

Lebanese Lullaby recorded March 10, 1940, by Robert Cook. Song sung by Nicholas Debs. Interview compiled by Lillian Stedman, and edited by Robert Cornwall.

Place of recording: Dyal-Upchurch Building, Jacksonville, Florida. Recorded by Robert Cook and Robert Cornwall.